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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABIDJAN 001331

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

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TAGS: [IV](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT GBAGBO WILL NOT DISMISS PRIME MINISTER
BANNY, AT LEAST NOT NOW

Classified By: AMBASSADOR AUBREY HOOKS FOR REASONS 1.4 B/D.

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting with the Ambassador on November 30, President Gbagbo made the following points:

-- he will not fire Prime Minister Banny, although he did not appreciate the PM's communiqu7 dealing with presidential decrees; instead, he fired the Director of the radio and television authority;

-- he will not ask the French to withdraw Licorne troops, at least not for now;

-- he would like to see the buffer zone (Zone of Confidence) eliminated since there is no longer a risk of war with the rebels;

-- he has blessed the efforts of general officers of the armed forces to encourage dialog between himself and the Prime Minister.

-- he would like to see elections held in July 2007. END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (C) President Gbagbo met with the Ambassador on Thursday, November 30, in a two-hour session that ended at midnight. After holding forth at length on the history of independence movements in French-speaking Africa, the President launched into the key points he had prepared for the meeting. He began by stating that he would not fire PM Banny, even though he did not appreciate the PM's communiqu7, which the President labeled as seditious, that put in question the President's decrees reinstating those allegedly involved in the toxic waste scandal. Many people are urging him to fire PM Banny, but that would be the wrong thing to do now. The Ambassador strongly supported the President's decision, and pointed out that firing Banny would put President Gbagbo at odds with the international community and the President would find himself challenging UN Resolution 1721, which would have serious consequences.

[13](#). (C) President Gbagbo said he was surprised when ten general officers, headed by Chief of Staff Mangou, showed up at the Presidential Palace on Tuesday and told him that they supported the Chief of State who had been duly elected, but they urged him to resume a dialog with the PM, since that was in the interests of the country. They wanted the President's permission to go see the PM to urge the PM also to resume the dialog with President Gbagbo. President Gbagbo said he was touched, and told them that not only did they have his authorization, but also his blessing. He said they came back to see him on Thursday morning to report on their positive meeting with the PM, and he had immediately called the PM. The PM would be coming to see him as soon as the IWG meeting

was over the following day.

14. (C) The President stated that the Zone of Confidence (ZOC) should be absorbed into the Government-controlled area. The rebels no longer have any military capacity to attack and he and his military have no intention of attacking the rebels; hence there is no need to maintain a ZOC. The Ambassador told the President that indeed the ZOC will disappear when conditions are ripe, such as an identification process and DDR well underway, and civil servants moving back north. All of that assumes that the level of confidence is far higher than it is now, especially in the tense environment that currently prevails in Cote d'Ivoire. The President also suggested that senior Government officials, such as Fologo (Head of the Economic and Social Commission), should start traveling in the North as a way of reestablishing Government authority. The Ambassador endorsed that idea, but pointed out that senior officials needed to start pianissimo, focusing strictly on their official functions, not with political campaigns. The Ambassador noted that the purpose of his own trips to the North were to emphasize the unity of the country, and reminded the President that the President's policies, such as blocking school exams in the North, had contributed to reinforcing the dividing line, not erasing it. COMMENT: President Gbagbo is naive if he thinks that the electric atmosphere he has just created is the moment to suggest erasing the ZOC, but then, this is his nature, to agitate the waters, then act as if nothing has happened.

15. (C) President Gbagbo stated that he will not ask France to withdraw Licorne troops, although that is what the population wants. The time is not yet ripe. Eventually, all French troops will have to leave so that Cote d'Ivoire will be an

ABIDJAN 00001331 002 OF 003

independent country. The Ambassador remarked that indeed now was not the time to ask French troops to leave. The USG sees Licorne troops as part of the security package, and if Licorne left, UNOCI would be weakened and exposed, something Washington would find troubling.

16. (C) Turning to his next point, President Gbagbo said that the first round of presidential elections should take place in July 2007. Should a second round be necessary, it could be organized in August or September. The Ambassador remarked that the sooner elections could take place, the better. While technically elections could be held as early as July, the political will necessary to move forward is still lacking, and the war of decrees with the PM this past week will complicate matters. The President stated confidently that the political will to move forward will be there.

17. (C) The Ambassador then shifted the discussion to the President's recent decrees. The Ambassador pointed out that reinstating those implicated in the toxic waste disaster gave the appearance of repudiating the PM. President Gbagbo said he had already instructed two district attorneys to investigate the involvement of Government officials in the toxic waste scandal, so PM Banny's investigative commission showed a lack of confidence in what the President had done. The Ambassador noted that all elements of the Government were slow to react to the toxic waste disaster, and the population expected to see some action, something which they had not yet seen from the district attorneys.

18. (C) The Ambassador focused considerable attention on the decree firing the director of RTI, the radio and television authority. President Gbagbo said that the Director of RTI should have consulted the Presidency before broadcasting a seditious statement. The Ambassador pointed out that the RTI Director is responsible for broadcasting the news, which a communiqu7 from the PM is, not in censuring the contents of Government communiqu7s. The Ambassador observed that the international community will see this decree as muzzling the press, and it puts the President at odds with the Pretoria

Accords. The Ambassador added that the PM was responsible for the contents of the communiqu7, not the Director of RTI. President Gbagbo said he had fired the Director of RTI rather than the PM just to avoid breaking a bigger pot.

¶9. (C) Surprisingly, President Gbagbo said the IWG (International Working Group) had never invited him to come to their meeting. The Ambassador asked whether the President would come if invited. He said, why not? If I am invited, I will go. He added that the IWG always saw him as the 'bad boy' and the IWG communiqu7s were one-sided. When the Ambassador asked the President again whether he was serious about attending the IWG meeting, the President said yes. COMMENT: The Ambassador raised this idea with the two Co-Presidents of the IWG, SRS G Schori and MFA Adada, both of whom approved of the idea and said they will try to meet with Gbagbo to invite him to the next IWG meeting. Interestingly, if Gbagbo accepts the invitation, it will show that he somehow accepts the legitimacy of the IWG.

¶10. (C) Throughout the meeting, President Gbagbo did not waste an opportunity to bash the French. He said that French Ambassador Janier had requested that the President meet with Minister of Cooperation Girardin (who heads the French delegation to the IWG) and he said no, not until his anger had passed. He commented that Minister Girardin had never requested to see him and had stated in a radio interview that she was prepared to meet with President Gbagbo if he invited her, something he found insulting and unacceptable. COMMENT: Mme. Girardin's first name is Brigitte, not "la conne" (bitch) as President Gbagbo generally refers to her.

¶11. (C) These days few people make it into President Gbagbo's good graces. When he mentioned Congolese Foreign Minister Rodolphe Adada, he characterized Adada as arrogant and full of himself, something which the President does not like.

12 (C) COMMENT: President Gbagbo is often difficult to read. He appears confident and self-assured, but he is clearly keeping an ear focused on the reaction of the international community. He has just rocked the political boat with his series of decrees and reminded everyone that he has to be reckoned with. Unfortunately, this is vintage Gbagbo, in that he has stirred the waters, but he does not know how to guide the boat to shore. And he has side-tracked the political process, which puts seriously at risk the objective of organizing elections by October 2007 as called

ABIDJAN 00001331 003 OF 003

for in UN Resolution 1721.
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